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SIPDIS

ROME FOR AMBASSADOR TONY HALL, MAX FINBERG AND TIM  
LAVELLE AT FODAG

DEPT FOR AF/S, AF/PD

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SUBJECT: MEDIA BACKGROUND AND THEMES FOR AMBASSADOR  
HALL'S VISIT TO ZIMBABWE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR POSTING ON THE  
INTERNET.

1. (SBU) Media Background: The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) has deliberately and successfully limited media freedom and the flow of information into and out of Zimbabwe. The majority of Zimbabweans must rely on heavily propagandistic government media for news and analysis of local and international events. The flow of news out of Zimbabwe has been restricted through the expulsion of once-resident foreign journalists and refusals to grant visas to international journalists wishing to visit.
2. (SBU) Radio is the most influential medium in Zimbabwe. The GoZ has a monopoly on local broadcast media and they offer only unrelenting pro-government propaganda. One independent broadcaster, Voice of the People, maintained offices in Zimbabwe and provided news and information via Dutch short wave facilities until its Harare office was completely destroyed by a sophisticated firebombing in late August 2002. Another short wave broadcaster, Short Wave Radio Africa, provides news and information from studios in the United Kingdom. Anecdotal information indicates that short wave broadcasters have only small audiences.
3. (SBU) Urban Zimbabweans have access to a courageous independent press consisting of one daily and three weeklies (the Daily News, Financial Gazette, Zimbabwe Independent, and the Standard). Prices, logistical challenges, and the fact that pro-government forces have banned the distribution of independent newspapers in rural areas means that most rural Zimbabweans (60% of the population) have no access to these publications. The independent press is under steady pressure from the GoZ and pro-government forces. Arrests of editors and reporters are common and the Daily News has twice been bombed, most recently in January 2001 in a sophisticated attack that completely destroyed the paper's presses. No arrests have been made. The Daily News recently replaced its presses. A new media registration law, to come into force later this year, is likely to result in increased arrests and harassment of journalists working for the independent press.
4. (SBU) The GoZ owns and exercises tight editorial control over two dailies and three weeklies (the Herald, Chronicle, Sunday Mail, Sunday News and Manica Post). Although the circulation of these papers has seen a steady decline, they are generally the only newspapers available in rural Zimbabwe. There is a distinct double standard in the application of media control laws to the independent and government-owned media.
5. (SBU) Over the last 18 months, non-Zimbabweans working for the BBC, Agence France Presse, the Mail and Guardian (South Africa) and other international media have been forced to leave the country. BBC has explicitly been banned. The new media registration law is likely to result in the closure of the Associated Press, Reuters and AFP bureaus in Zimbabwe, all currently staffed by Zimbabwean citizens. The GoZ routinely denies visas to journalists who openly apply to visit the country for reporting purposes.
6. (U) Media Themes for Ambassador Hall's Visit: Ambassador Hall's visit could usefully promote several themes in the media:
  - A) Zimbabwe's food crisis is becoming increasingly severe.
  - B) The Government of Zimbabwe should make policy decisions to permit the private sector and a larger number of NGOs to take part in helping to meet the

nation's food needs.

C) Among the policy issues we believe are exacerbating the food crisis are the Grain Marketing Board's monopoly on grain imports and sales; unrealistically low controlled prices on staple foods; ponderous bureaucratic procedures for clearing donated food through Zimbabwean customs; and limitations on the NGOs permitted to participate in food distribution programs.

D) The United States has been the principal food donor to Zimbabwe, with generous contributions from the United Kingdom and the European Union. Additional assistance from other donors is needed to meet Zimbabwe's food needs.

E) While Southern Africa's drought is a factor in the food crisis, the Government of Zimbabwe needs to face the fact that it also bears responsibility for the situation. Macroeconomic mismanagement (including deficit spending, a grossly overvalued currency, multiple exchange rates, and unrealistic price controls), a violent and chaotic land redistribution program that has badly damaged the nation's agricultural sector, and a disregard for the rule of law that has alienated foreign investors and business, have all played a substantial role in creating conditions under which more than half of all Zimbabweans need food aid.

F) The United States will not politicize its food assistance to Zimbabwe. In spite of our serious concerns about the actions and policies of the Zimbabwean government, we will not abandon the people of Zimbabwe at this time of need.

G) We are working closely with the World Food Program and our bilateral NGO partners to make sure that the food we provide is distributed on a non-partisan basis.

SULLIVAN